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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Equality Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

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Over fifty years ago, countries adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". That fundamental right has echoed for decades in conferences, treaties, and declarations. Almost ten years ago, in the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing, 189 governments agreed that laws that discriminate against women undermine equality and pledged to "revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex." Yet inequality, including it its most overt form, has not been vanquished.

In 1999, Equality Now published a representative sampling of explicitly discriminatory laws from 45 countries, in our report *Words and Deeds -- Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing +5 Review Process* (at www.equalitynow.org). The following year, the Special Session of the General Assembly, convened to review the Platform for Action, adopted an Outcome Document that established a target date of 2005 for the revocation of discriminatory laws. That date is fast approaching.

In anticipation of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and the upcoming target date of 2005, Equality Now has updated its report, highlighting sex discriminatory laws that remain in force, denying women the fundamental right to equality. We urge each member state to take immediate action to rescind or amend all discriminatory laws, including those highlighted in Equality Now's report. Such action would demonstrate respect for the commitment made in Beijing and renewed in 2000 at the Special Session of the General Assembly, as well as the many other treaties, declarations, and statements that have been made recognizing and affirming sex equality as a fundamental human right.

We are pleased to report that a number of countries – eleven of forty-five – have repealed the discriminatory laws highlighted in Equality Now's 1999 report. Among these countries are CSW members Peru, which eliminated an exemption from punishment for rapists who marry their victims, and Turkey, which eliminated discriminatory laws relating to age of marriage and decision-making within the household. Such reforms set the example of moving from words to action, demonstrating a commitment to the human rights of women and to fulfilling the obligations undertaken in the Beijing Platform for Action and elsewhere. However, the great majority of laws highlighted in Equality Now's 1999 report, including laws in a number of other CSW member countries, remain in force and are included in Equality Now's updated report, *Words and Deeds -- Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing +10 Review Process* (at www.equalitynow.org).

Equality Now has highlighted *de jure* discrimination with regard to violence against women, personal status, economic status, and marital status. Discrimination goes far deeper than these explicitly discriminatory laws, which represent a small component of the discrimination women face on a daily basis in virtually every country in the world. Discrimination in the impact of facially neutral laws, disparate enforcement of law, denial of equal opportunity in education and employment, exclusion of women from political representation, deprivation of sexual and reproductive rights, and social forces and physical violence that stereotype and subordinate women all constitute fundamental violations of the human right to equality. But laws that explicitly discriminate against women symbolize the open disrespect of governments for this fundamental right.

We hope that the CSW and its individual members will play a leadership role to ensure that governments meet the target date of 2005 established by the Outcome Document for revocation of discriminatory laws.